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SUBJECT: FIGHTING ERUPTS IN MALAKAL

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Calm is slowly returning to Malakal following a multi-hour firefight in the center of the state capital provoked by Gabriel Tanginiya's return to the South. The SAF-aligned militia commander was directly responsible for the bloody 2006 confrontation between the SAF and SPLA in Malakal town. Casualty reports remain unconfirmed, but UNMIS reports it has successfully safe-havened all INGOs into its Sector Three Headquarters. SPLA has taken control of the airport and is slowly restoring calm to the town. Tanginiya remains in Malakal and UNMIS/Juba is facilitating the travel of JIU Deputy National Commander (SPLA) Thomas Cirillo and Ceasefire Joint Military Commission Head Mac Paul to Malakal today to convene an Area Joint Military Committee to mitigate against further violence.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Nuer militia leader General Gabriel Tanginiya defied the standing-order for his arrest in Southern Sudan, in place since 2006, and returned to Malakal, Upper Nile State, on February 23. Less than twenty-four hours following his arrival, militia groups allegedly aligned with the Nuer commander, to include select SAF JIU officers, began indiscriminate shooting in the town and were quickly engaged by SPLA. Initial, albeit still unconfirmed, reports place the death toll from the morning's violence at thirty-one. The SPLA has closed the airport in Malakal. T-55 tanks and heavy weapons, thought to belong to the JIU, have been deployed in the town center; UNMIS and SPLA confirm that the tanks fired their turret-mounted 100mm cannons from the deployed T-55s. While SPLA sources maintain that the multi-hour firefight had begun subsiding shortly before 11:00AM local, UNMIS/Malakal and select NGOs report that fighting continues. However, UNMIS security staff in Malakal believe the SPLA has largely resumed control of the town and expect the situation will revert to normal by mid-afternoon.

¶3. (SBU) UNMIS polchief Muin Shreim provided CDA Fernandez a similar version of events following a donors briefing with the SRSG on February 24. He said that after the 2006 incident, Tanginiya was made a Major General in SAF and kept in Khartoum. Tanginiya just received a 7 day pass (presumably from the SAF, but apparently not coordinated with the SPLA) to attend to "personal business" in Malakal, which had to do with his son's legal problems. SPLA got wind that he was going there yesterday, and a late night meeting of the CJMC decided that Tanginiya must leave Malakal as soon as possible, today or tomorrow. The CJMC decisions seem to have been poorly communicated to the field. UNMIS offered to host Tanginiya last night, but he refused and stayed at the SAF JIU HQ. This morning the SAF JIU was transporting him from JIU HQ to UNMIS when they were confronted by SPLA - both JIU and regular SPLA. Arguments ensued, and shots were fired triggering further violence. Tanginya returned to JIU HQ, which was then surrounded by SPLA. Shreim said that there were four wounded as a result of the initial clash, the only casualties they could confirm as they had been treated by UNMIS. He said (at 11:45 AM Khartoum time) that "the situation is now under control." CDA also alerted AEC Chair and P-3 Ambassadors on the situation earlier in the day.

¶4. (SBU) UNMIS Sector Three Security Officer Ljuobmir Radovnikovic told ConGen PolOff that civilian casualties were believed to be light, and that while the situation was "messy," he expected it to be under-control "within a few hours." UNMIS Force Protection was in the process of rescuing INGOs Solidarite and MedAir staff from

the town center so they could be safe-havened with other INGO staff at UNMIS Sector Three Headquarters. Neither UNMIS nor other UN or QINGOS facilities in town have been a target of the violence. Reached at the height of the fighting on February 24, SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations James Hoth Mai noted to ConGen PolOff that a majority of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) JIU contingent was moved from the JIU headquarters by the SPLA to their barracks along the Nile's banks in order to distance themselves from Tanginiya and select JIU mutineers, as Hoth characterized it, "for their own safety."

¶15. (SBU) Hoth told ConGen PolOff February 24 that Tanginiya's arrival in Upper Nile State had caught the SPLA, SAF JIU contingent, and government of Upper Nile State by surprise. (NOTE: GOSS Minister for Internal Affairs Paul Mayom told Consul General February 24 that Upper Nile Governor Gatluak Deng Garang is not even in the state. END NOTE.) According to Hoth, the only actors who knew of Tanginiya's plans were SAF Military Intelligence officers who had arrived at the airport in Malakal in an attempt to escort the Nuer commander into town. For this reason, the SPLA believes that SAF military intelligence had a role in chartering the flight that brought him, and possibly induced Tanginiya's return outright.

¶16. (SBU) UNMIS/Malakal and SPLA sources confirm that SPLA MPs assigned to Malakal airport detained Tanginiya and the SAF military intelligence officers on February 23 until representatives from the state's Security Committee could arrive at the airport. Hours of negotiations ensued between the Committee and Tanginiya, with the latter refusing on three separate occasions to re-board the aircraft and return to Khartoum. Hoth maintains that the Committee emphasized that they did not want trouble from Tanginiya, and they were willing to forego his arrest if he were to return peacefully to Khartoum.

¶17. (SBU) By mid-afternoon, SPLA D/COS (Administration) MG Salva Mathok ordered the SPLA JIU contingent to forcibly place Tanginiya onto the aircraft, an order over-ruled by state-level representatives fearing a backlash. By night-fall, Security Committee representatives had secured permission to place Tanginiya at UNMIS Sector Three Headquarters overnight. This suggestion was also rebuffed by Tanginiya, and he instead moved into the JIU Headquarters mere blocks from the Governor's Office. (NOTE: Other sources within the SPLA state Tanginiya was moved to the SAF barracks, on the northwest side of the town. The JIU in Malakal, as elsewhere in Sudan, is neither joint nor integrated: the SPLA contingent resides ten minutes across town by car from its SAF counterparts. END NOTE.)

¶18. (SBU) Hoth asserted that Tanginiya remained at the JIU Headquarters as of this morning, although rumors concerning his whereabouts continue to fly in both Juba and Upper Nile State, with wild rumors of fighting in Renk in addition to reports that allied militias are moving out of Upper Nile toward Old Fangak. UNDSS is attempting to facilitate the travel of JIU Deputy National Commander (SPLA) Thomas Cirillo to Malakal today for an Area Joint Military Commission meeting. UNMIS is also reportedly attempting to move its Force Commander to Upper Nile State to further reduce tension. As of mid-day on February 24, (SAF) JIU Commander Abdul Majhid did not have plans to travel outside of Juba.

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT: The Government of Southern Sudan, and the SPLM in particular, have increasingly believed that the NCP would attempt to stir up trouble in the South as a means of diverting attention from any ICC fallout and have long seen Khartoum's hand in tribal unrest throughout the South. With an ICC announcement now set for March 4, and the GNU Presidency meeting today in Juba, the timing of Tanginiya's arrival in Malakal is certainly suspect from the SPLM's point of view, and ill-considered on the part of the SAF. The Minister for Presidential Affairs reported to ConGen staff in late January that the SPLM received reports of NISS training factions aligned with erstwhile Foreign Minister (and SPLM turncoat) Lam Akoh, and that Akol met with NISS Chief Salah Ghosh as recently as January 26. Tanginiya's presence in Malakal could signal the tip of an extremely problematic iceberg that threatens to sink the CPA if the NCP doesn't move quickly to rein in its more subversive elements and tendencies at a time when Sudan and the CPA are already under extreme pressure. END COMMENT.

FERNANDEZ